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UNCLAS CHENNAI 002446

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SUBJECT: ISRO FRUSTRATED BY SLOW PACE OF SPACE COOPERATION

REF: A) New Delhi 5758 B) State 181404

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) reiterated its frustration with the lack of a framework for cooperation on space exploration and research with the U.S. when high level ISRO officials met with us on October 6. The officials called India's upcoming Chandrayaan-1 moon mission a "litmus test" for Indo-U.S. space collaboration, and expressed their perception that "a certain group in the U.S." opposes cooperation. These sentiments echo what other USG officials have heard from ISRO representatives in the past several months, especially regarding lack of resolution about the Chandrayaan TAA. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 6 during his initial visit to Bangalore, new Chennai Principal Officer met at ISRO headquarters with Dr. Rajeev Lochan, Assistant Scientific Secretary, and Mr. Jacob Ninan, Director of International

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Cooperation. The ISRO officials spent most of the hour-long meeting politely but very firmly renewing their complaints about the perceived slow pace of Indo-U.S. space collaboration and the lack of a proper framework or mechanism for cooperation (see ref A). They said that from their perspective Prime Minister Singh's July visit to Washington has yet to show results at the working level, and they went so far as to question whether "a certain group (unnamed) in the U.S." actually opposes cooperation.

¶3. (SBU) Lochan and Ninan specifically cited the Indian's upcoming Chandrayaan-1 moon mission as a prime opportunity for cooperation, and they mentioned the proposal to place on board an instrument developed by Johns Hopkins University. They said ISRO was still waiting for a U.S. response to ISRO-proposed changes to the Technical Assistance Agreement. Lochan called the Chandrayaan-1 opportunity a "litmus test" for cooperation, saying that if it cannot be resolved "there is no future for cooperation."

¶4. (SBU) The ISRO officials also complained about what they view as the slow and circuitous route for communications on space issues. They said the process of sending messages from the Department of State to Embassy New Delhi to be passed to the MEA and ultimately to ISRO sometimes took weeks. They claimed that on the Indian side ISRO is empowered to deal directly with foreign entities and need only keep the MEA and Prime Minister's office informed. The officials also contrasted their frustrating dealings with the U.S. with the "much more responsive," less bureaucratic European Space Agency. They said earlier, similar problems with the Europeans were sorted out in a day-long meeting.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Disconnect within ISRO? Although ISRO's frustration is real, the officials may be overstating their own supposedly streamlined communications and their perceived lack of responsiveness from the U.S. side, as well as airing often-heard grievances about the TAA. During the October 6 meeting Dr. Jacob mentioned the lack of a Technology Safeguards Agreement (TSA) for satellite launches. Dr. Ninan quickly corrected his colleague, pointing out that a new draft had been received (likely the one transmitted in ref b). The expected October 17 signing of the "Science and Technology Umbrella Agreement" and the Nov. 30-Dec. 1 High Technology Cooperation Group meeting present immediate opportunities to try to resolve pending disputes on the Chandrayaan TAAs and, more importantly, to promote other opportunities for space collaboration with India. End comment.

¶6. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy New Delhi.

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